



## PROBLEMS OF URBANIZATION: POVERTY AND CRIME

**Ms. Rajni**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University School of Open Learning, Panjab University, Chandigarh.*

### **Abstract**

*Urban poverty and urban crime are not just a manifestation of a population explosion and demographic change, or even of the vast impersonal forces of globalization. Slums and urban crime must be seen as the result of a failure of housing policies, laws, and delivery systems, as well as of national and urban policies or failure of urban governance. This paper argued sociological understanding of poverty and crime and its consequences on urban growth.*

**Keywords: Poverty, Crime, Slums, Governance.**

### **Introduction**

A rapid shift of the population from rural areas to urban centers, a process referred to as urbanization, is occurring across much of the developing world, especially in India. This results in unregulated and informal economic activities that are very common, both in terms of the numbers of informally employed and in terms of the goods and services provided by the informal economy. It is within the context of economic growth and urbanization that urban poverty urban crime is noted to be on the rise in India largely due to weak governance systems. This paper highlights these issues in detail.

### **Poverty**

Like slums, poverty is something that people believe they can easily distinguish; in fact, the concept is difficult to define. Urban poverty is often defined in terms of household income – for example, the proportion of a city's households who are earning less than what is needed to afford a 'basket' of basic necessities, or living on less than US\$1 or US\$2 a day.

Monetary measures of poverty have been used in many countries, but they do not capture the multidimensional nature of poverty. People may be poor not just because of low incomes, but their poverty may derive from an inadequate, unstable or risky asset base needed as a cushion to carry them through hard times. They may be poor because their housing is overcrowded, of low quality or is insecure; because they do not have access to safe water, adequate sanitation, health care or schools; because they lack a supportive safety net; or because they are not protected by laws and regulations concerning civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, discrimination and environmental health, or because they are denied a voice within political systems.

### **Constituents of Urban Poverty**

1. Inadequate income (and thus inadequate consumption of necessities including food and, often, safe and sufficient water; often problems of indebtedness, with debt repayments significantly reducing the income available for necessities).
2. Inadequate, unstable or risky asset base (non-material and material including educational attainment and housing) for individuals, households or communities.
3. Inadequate shelter (typically poor quality, overcrowded and insecure).
4. Inadequate provision of 'public' infrastructure (e.g. piped water, sanitation, drainage, roads, and footpaths) which increases the health burden and often the work burden.
5. Inadequate provision for basic services such as daycare/schools/vocational training, health care, emergency services, public transport, communications, law enforcement.
6. Limited or no safety net to ensure basic consumption can be maintained when income falls; also to ensure access to shelter and health care when these can no longer be paid for.
7. Inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law, including laws and regulations regarding civil and political rights, occupational health and safety, pollution control, environmental health, protection from violence and other crimes, protection from discrimination and exploitation.
8. Voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and Bureaucratic structures, leading to little or no possibility of receiving entitlements; of organizing, making demands and getting a fair response; or of receiving support for developing their own initiatives. Also, no means of ensuring accountability from aid agencies, NGOs, public agencies and private utilities or being able to participate in the definition and implementation of their urban poverty programmes.

*Source: Satterthwaite, 2001.*



Most countries have some way of measuring poverty (locally defined poverty). The common types of measures are those based on income, which includes:

**Absolute poverty:** this comprises people who cannot afford to buy a ‘minimum basket’ of goods – which sometimes is just food and water for minimum nutrition, but should include other necessities, such as clothing, shelter and transport to employment, education or the means to obtain the basic necessities.

**Relative poverty:** this is the proportion of people below some threshold, which is often a percentage of local median income.

Income-based measures substantially underestimate urban poverty because they do not make allowance for the extra costs of urban living (housing and transport, plus the lack of opportunity to grow one’s own food). They also do not reveal intra-household poverty in situations where there is an unequal power among household members so that it is possible for women and children to live in poverty even though the larger household of which they are a part is not classified as such. Research has shown that budgetary allocations are different in households where women act as decision-makers. Measures of household income also do not reveal relevant background conditions; they do not, in themselves, provide information on the spatial distribution of poverty or its national context. Nevertheless, the main results of recent World Bank studies are worth recording, as they show broad trends, useful for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Slums and poverty are closely related and mutually reinforcing, but the relationship is not always direct or simple. On the one hand, slum dwellers are not a homogeneous population, and some people of reasonable incomes choose to live within, or on, the edges of slum communities. Even though most slum dwellers work in the informal economy, it is not unusual for them to have incomes that exceed the earnings of formal-sector employees.

On the other hand, in many cities, there are poorer outside slum areas than within them. Slums are designated areas where it is easiest to see poor people in the highest concentrations and the worst conditions, but even the most exclusive and expensive areas will have some low-income people.

Slum conditions are caused by poverty and inadequate housing responses, which are mutually reinforcing, to some extent. It is not surprising that the characteristics of the settlement or housing are often confused by act or by implication with the characteristics of the people living in them. The issues of living conditions, poverty and poor people’s management of their own situation are amalgamated, and cause-and-effect relationships are confusing. This presents a policy and delivery problem for programmes aimed at addressing slum conditions as part of an overall poverty reduction agenda. The converse is the case for non-housing poverty reduction programmes, which sometimes presume that their activities will result in improvements in housing, infrastructure and service delivery in slum areas – but ‘trickle through’ to housing may be extremely slow or non-existent unless the income improvements are substantial and sustained.

Although poverty in urban areas has been increasing for some decades and there are now higher numbers of the ‘poorest of the poor’ in urban centres throughout the world than at any previous time, the urban poor is usually able to help themselves more than their rural counterparts. Indeed, the immigrant urban poor have largely moved voluntarily in order to exploit actual or perceived economic opportunities. Opportunities manifest, in part, due to the growing urban informal sector, which is most spectacularly visible in the many growing and large-scale informal and squatter settlements in urban centres. In many cities, the informal sector accounts for as much as 60 percent of employment of the urban population and may well serve the needs of an equally high proportion of citizens through the provision of goods and services.

It cannot be assumed that those living in slums that appear physically uniform all have the same needs and demands. The necessity to distinguish between different levels of poverty has been recognized in targeting and tailoring resources at those most in need. Women – widows in particular – children, unemployed youths and disabled people have all been identified as the most vulnerable amongst the poor, as have female-headed households and certain ethnic and religious groups. Where housing conditions are poor, such as in slums and informal urban settlements, it is vulnerable who suffer most from environmental degradation and inadequate service provision.



Increasingly, the phenomenon of **women-headed households** is common in urban areas and especially in slums. Women-headed households constitute 30 percent or more of the total households in urban low-income settlements in parts of Africa. Women-headed households tend to have fewer income-earning opportunities than male-headed households and are poorer. Typically, women have lower levels of education, work longer hours, retain responsibility for childcare as well as productive and community management roles, and have poorer diets and more restricted mobility than men. In general, women-headed households will have narrower housing choices by virtue of their low incomes. Sometimes their low social and legal status limit their housing choices, in addition to their exclusion from holding title to land through either legal or cultural means. This is nothing-just Feminization of Poverty.

Urban Poverty is about how the poor struggle to survive within

*Urban areas, mainly through informal shelter and informal income-generation strategies and about the inadequacy of both public and market responses to the plight of the urban poor.*

### **Failure of Urban Governance**

The most important factor that limits progress in improving housing and living conditions of low-income groups in informal settlements and slums is the lack of genuine political will to address the issue in a fundamentally structured, sustainable and large-scale manner. There is no doubt that the political will to achieve long-lasting and structured interventions constitutes the key to success, particularly when accompanied by local ownership and leadership, and the mobilization of the potential and capacity of all the stakeholders, particularly the people themselves. Lessons from several countries underscore the importance and the fundamental role of sustained political will and commitment to improving or reducing slums.

The failure of policy is at all levels – global, national and local. At the global level, policies that have weakened national governments without any Countervailing central control appears to be leading to unrestrained globalization that is accommodating greater inequality and marginalization. At the national level, liberalization and the sectoral fragmentation of policy and analytical and institutional frameworks have failed to support the urban-rural and cross-sectoral dynamics that are critical both to sustainable economic growth and the distribution of its opportunities. At the local level, a startling lack of capacity to cope with, or manage, the situation has left many slum citizens in a no-man's land of illegality, insecurity and environmental degradation.

*The poor suffer most from the lack of governance and political will, as weak urban governance meets the impact of growing inequality, corruption and imbalances in resource allocation.*

The urban poor is trapped in an informal and 'illegal' world – in slums that are not reflected on maps, where waste is not collected, where taxes are not paid and where public services are not provided. Officially, they do not exist. Although they may reside within the administrative boundary of a town or city, their local authority may well be a slumlord or mafia leader, rather than city council staff, who often no longer attempt to assert their jurisdiction or even enter the slums. As illegal or unrecognized residents, many of these slum dwellers have no property rights, nor the security of tenure but instead make whatever arrangements they can in an informal, unregulated and, in some respects, expensive parallel market.

### **Urban Crime**

One of the most important barriers of urbanization is a crime in cities. Cities are the crossroads of political power, economic innovations, and cultural affairs. They attract people because they so frequently offer better opportunities for jobs, education, housing, health services and entertainment. They are engines of prosperity and diversity, but they are also increasingly plagued by pollution, overcrowding, poor hygiene conditions, poverty, social exclusion, violence, and crime.



Rapid urbanization has put resources and services under great pressure. Most of the urban poor in developing countries who can find work are likely to spend their lives in insecure, poorly paid jobs. And rural migrants often have no other choice than to settle in shanty towns and experience extreme poverty. Today's mass urbanization is accompanied by a growing sense of vulnerability among city dwellers faced with unsafe streets, exposure to hazards and insufficient access to basic items such as water, food, and healthcare. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, about a billion people live in poor- quality, overcrowded housing, in slums, or in informal settlements. Moreover, the plight of some natural disaster victims shows how vulnerable densely populated urban areas can be to the tragic consequences of disasters and how difficult it can be for humanitarian organizations to help. In addition to natural disasters, urban violence poses a further serious challenge for vulnerable people. All problems are exacerbated when there are poverty, economic inequality, unemployment, social exclusion, and marginalization. As the world grows increasingly urban, violence in many cities is reaching unprecedented levels and is making daily life in some places almost like living in a warzone.

Urban violence and other crime – ranging from muggings to gang shootings and organized crime – are a source of growing concern and fear. Risk factors differ considerably. Crime often coincides with high levels of poverty, discrimination, economic disparity, social inequality and drug abuse or trafficking. Other contributing factors include political or economic instability, the proliferation of small arms and the presence of gangs or other organized groups. Risk factors often exist in clusters. They are not necessarily caused, but they help to predict the occurrence of violence, its development, and its escalation.

Life in urban areas may be disrupted by lack of public and social services (water and sanitation, healthcare, schooling, etc.) and as a result of tight territorial control by organized groups or by State forces trying to suppress them. Certain areas may be off-limits, even for social and humanitarian agencies, and providing the help needed is often difficult, if not impossible.

The fear of crime has changed the nature of cities with a high level of violence, separating social groups, changing the open, interactive nature of the community, and enforcing segregation through gated communities and walled enclaves.

Crime is not, of course, a uniquely urban phenomenon, but combined with the imagined nature of urban social life, its alienating and anomic character, the effects of crime on its victims is easily translated into one of them, if not the major disadvantages of living in cities.

Communities with very high rates of youth violence are places in which there are high concentrations of criminogenic commodities. Both alcohol use and drug use are highly correlated with violent crime, with drug use, especially, being linked to an oppositional culture.

Urban areas are characterized as more prone to violence and less safe than either suburban or rural areas. The question of what makes some neighborhoods more dangerous places to live in is difficult to answer, but several attempts have been made. The classic works of Wirth (1938), Shaw and McKay (1942, 1969) and Simmel (1951) suggest that certain aspects of the urban environment promote social disorganization and individual alienation. These two conditions may lead to deviant social behaviour that could result in urban areas being more dangerous places to live in than less urban environments. Included among the elements that contribute to deviant behaviour are size, density, heterogeneity, low economic status, residential mobility and family disruptions. Louis Wirth in his essay (Urbanism as a Way of Life) believed that primary group relationship (among family and kin, for example) is replaced by secondary group relationships (among neighbors and coworkers) in urban society. The secondary relationship is based on temporary, superficial and impersonal interactions. As a consequence, urban life produces anonymity and distance among urban dwellers, which rarely get to know even those people with whom they interact daily, such as shopkeepers, fellow commuters, coworkers, and even neighbors. Wirth believed that secondary relations eventually lead to a family breakup, alcoholism, crime, and other negative aspects of urban life (Wirth, 1938). Sampson and Groves (1989) tested Shaw and McKay's hypothesis on data from England and Wales and found that the social- disorganization theory provided a good explanation of teenage crime rates in urban areas in those areas of Britain. The fact that the theory was a good explanation of juvenile crime in a country other than the USA suggests that the effects of some aspects of urban environments on individual-level criminal behaviour may not be country-specific. Others have also tested Shaw and McKay's theory of a relationship between social disorganization and crime.



### **Conclusion**

Urban poverty, no doubt a challenge to urban governance and of course barrier to urbanization as some ill problems born out of an alliance between urban poverty and slums. Due to push and pull factors many poor people from rural areas migrate to cities and live in slums and participate in informal services of the urban economy like Tiffin service, a rickshaw puller, street vendors, domestic helpers and so on. Though formal service sector and informal sector are dependent upon each other, there are huge differences in the accessibility, power and basic facilities between these two sectors. Another issue we discussed was an urban crime. Urban crime is a manifest function of the urban economy. Chain snatchings; a crime against aged and women are in a rampage in urban areas. Crime is a product of delinquency, failure of law and order, corruption, inflation, and poverty. Many Chit Fund companies mushroom in urban areas by the elite section no by the poor people. So crime in urban areas is not due to poverty but by many factors. Factors like the resurgence of ethnicity born only in cities, not in villages. Therefore riots happened only in cities, not in rural areas. There is a need for retrospection to understand the link between poverty, power, and crime.

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